DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 072 EC 302 529

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TITLE Some Social Communication Skill Objectives and Teaching Strategies for People with Autism. Revised. Social Series.
INSTITUTION Indiana Univ., Bloomington. Indiana Resource Center for Autism.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 34p.; For related booklets, see EC 302 520-530. Revised from "Teaching Social and Leisure Skills to Youth with Autism" (1981).
AVAILABLE FROM Indiana Resource Center for Autism, Indiana University, 2853 E. Tenth St., Bloomington, IN 47408-2601 ($2).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Autism; *Communication Skills; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interpersonal Competence; Skill Development; Social Behavior; *Student Educational Objectives; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This booklet on teaching social communication skills to individuals with autism discusses selection of social communication objectives, selection of learning environments, and methods of teaching social communication skills. Sample social communication objectives are presented, with a rationale, lead-up activities, teaching procedures, associated objectives, plan for motivation, and precautions specified for each objective. Sample objectives include the use of "no," the use of "help," choosing leisure activities, using "Hi" and "Bye," polite speech, whispering to self, voice usage, various conversation skills, using names, talking to peers, talking about activities, answering the door, answering the telephone, and giving a compliment. The booklet concludes that learning and practicing these skills relies on structured social group teaching throughout a person's life, as well as reliable feedback and support from peers. (JDD)

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Social Series

SOME SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILL OBJECTIVES and TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

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by

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1992

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Teaching Social and Leisure Skills
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The Need for Teaching Social Communication Skills

As children grow older in our society, an increasingly sophisticated use of language is demanded in order to meet social expectations. People with autism of all ages and levels frequently do not understand and apply the full function and use of language. Because of this, people with autism are often isolated by the use of inappropriate behaviors at times when they don't understand or don't have the skills to respond. Even people who are highly verbal for some purposes often have trouble using language effectively at times of high emotion or stress. This tendency may prevent some people from participating in social or work activities within their capabilities and greatly limit their ability to function meaningfully in the community. Therefore, increasing the functional and social use of communication must be a primary goal early in a person's program and remain a central focus throughout his/her life. In order to successfully teach functional and social communication skills, the communication program must:

- Be individual-specific. Programming must be based on this specific person's favorite materials, foods, activities, needs, and interests.
- Be individual-centered. Programs must be planned according to what specifically will help this person function as independently as possible.
- Be success-oriented. Lessons must start where this person can experience success while gradually challenging him.
- Include interactors in all settings. All people must be consistent in order to aid in generalizing skill usage from one setting to another.
- Center on functional use. Skills must be taught in context, utilized in daily life and in multiple settings.

Selection of Social Communication Objectives

Goal selection must be based on an accurate and descriptive assessment and on ongoing observation and analysis. Based on these assessment findings, the entire staff and parents must determine the most important communication needs for the person. These needs will be found only by carefully looking at all areas of the person's life. Look not only at his communication skills, but also at the relationship of communication to his behavior, to his social skills,

and to his ability to function outside the home. Consider his future needs as well.

For example, in looking carefully at the person's behavior, it may be discovered that he has an outburst every time someone touches something that belongs to him. A logical objective for instruction, might be, "Will tell other students, 'Leave my ____ alone'."

A careful inspection of the person's skills in social relationships might reveal that she knows how to play some games, but in her after school recreation program, she stands around and does not participate. Perhaps this person needs to learn how to ask if she can join games.

A careful observation may reveal that a person who has a lot of verbal output becomes confused and angry when given directions containing certain prepositions. His program will need specific instruction on prepositions and their application in natural settings.

At home, the learner might use the telephone inappropriately. The whole family might profit by his learning to answer the phone correctly and inform the desired family member that he is wanted on the phone.

Individuals with autism functioning at low communication levels will benefit from practical communication training, such as learning to indicate "stop", "more", "help", "no", and "go away." People with autism need to learn that communication is a tool for interacting with people and that it is effective for them. For example, learners benefit little from learning to name pictures because they still don't know how to use the labels. In many cases they are not able to generalize the use of the labels from the pictures to objects in their world. Not until they have learned that talking, gesturing, pointing to pictures on a communication board, or spelling words is useful to them will they be motivated to learn to use syntax or vocabulary in meaningful ways.

Learning Environments

When teaching functional and imminently useful communication skills, it is essential to use everyone possible in all environments. We know that people with autism have trouble generalizing learned skills from one environment to another. Generalizing learned skills is not an issue when new skills are learned right in the contexts in

which they are to be used. Communication programs with individuals with autism must not be carried out in a sterile therapy room with pictures or contrived situations. Training will be much more effective right in the classroom, work, or community environment using the natural materials that the person deals with during the day. For example, if the person is learning to ask for help instead of screaming, work on this everytime he has to open the sticky classroom door, everytime he has earned some free time with the record player, or whenever he is involved in an activity in which he needs some assistance. A speech-language clinician will not be present for most of these incidents. Rather, the teacher, teacher's aide, job coach, clinician, parent, physical education teacher, and whoever else interacts with that person needs to approach each one of these situations in a similar manner. They must have frequent contact with one another to share methods and successes. If a person with autism is using a communication skill in one setting but not in others, this should be discussed in a staff meeting with very specific procedures outlined for all to use.

Regular speech-language sessions are best carried out in the person's own environment with maximum opportunities for staff, family, and others to observe. In addition, the speech-language clinician will have opportunities to observe others in contact with the person. The increased contact between parents, teachers, and staff should result in a more consistent and therefore more effective total effort.

Teaching Social Communication Skills

After selecting and writing an objective, think it through carefully, identifying the situations in which this skill needs to be used. If possible, teach in these situations at the times the target responses are most logically elicited. By so doing, problems of generalizing and carry-over are minimized. In addition, the usefulness of the communication skill may be more apparent to the learner and the reinforcement may be intrinsic to the activity itself.

For example, if the objective is for the person to learn to say, "no" as a refusal, find situations in which the person usually refuses to do an activity. Make sure these are situations in which he might be allowed to refuse for the duration of time that "no" is being learned. Find similar situations in all environments with all adults agreeing

to approach these situations in a similar manner. Examples are: refusing grape juice, refusing to sit in a certain chair, or refusing to hug. Offer grape juice at snack time. When the person begins his usual refusal behavior, model, "Tell me, No grape juice. No." A gesture or picture can be used as well as the verbal direction.

If the objective for another person is to respond appropriately when being introduced, plan this lesson on a day someone will be coming to school, work, or group home. In this way, the learner can practice for a real situation and then apply the skill immediately.

Use familiar materials that the learner interacts with daily. Use concrete objects as much as possible. Make experiences as real as possible. During lunch and snack time work on concepts such as asking for things politely or offering items to others. Role playing situations is sometimes useful, but using the real-life situations as they arise is often the most effective programming. For example, when working on describing emotions, pictures of people displaying various emotions will probably be less effective teaching materials than role playing a situation where something has made the teacher or learner angry. However, the person with autism will understand that concept most fully when he or another student is actually feeling and acting angry. Use these times to help the student label and describe the feeling. Not only may he learn the concept, but he may also learn how to appropriately deal with strong feelings.

Realistic situations may be set up for the purpose of working on functional skills during lessons. Having a party during communication time with various foods will provide practice time for indicating choice, for offering something to a peer, or asking for more. After teaching has begun, help the person use the new skill many times throughout the day in various situations.

Reward imperfect attempts, at first, since it is imperative that the person learns how to use this skill and that he learns why his communication attempts receive a response. Articulation or perfect point execution can be worked on much later. Just as we respond to very young children's misarticulated speech, so we must reinforce the imperfect signs, points, and words of people with autism who are just learning to communicate. Deal with accuracy later.

At first the learning involves giving power and meaning so people with autism are motivated to use social communication. Since communication is difficult for people with autism, motivation is

vital. Use the logical outcome of the situation whenever possible. For example, a person who wants to use another's bicycle may need the teacher's model and prompt to ask the owner for permission to ride it. Ideally, the request will be rewarded by a positive response and he will see that his talking was useful and effective. If the response is "no," the adult will need to provide reinforcement for "good asking" and perhaps suggest alternative activities.

External motivators such as charts, points, or tokens may be necessary at times. If so, the challenge is to make the reward system motivating enough to elicit appropriate communication without being the sole reason for the communication. The person needs to learn that communication is necessary and functional in itself even when not tangibly rewarded.

Sample Objectives for Social Communication Skills

Some sample social communication objectives are included in this chapter to provide ideas and provoke thoughts. These are not intended to serve as a total language curriculum and should not necessarily be used in the order given. Rather, they are samples.

Objectives should be tailored to fit any particular person's interest, needs, and total program. Some of the sample objectives teach a verbal response, others a signed response, others a pointed response on a communication board or keyboard. Response modes should be adapted according to each person's communication needs. The more advanced objectives are designed for verbal youth, since the greatest number of persons operating at these higher levels are verbal. However, these too can be adapted for fluent signers or those using facilitated communication.

GOAL: WILL INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

* Will indicate refusal in response to sample questions accompanied by objects or pictures with a head shake, manual sign or verbal response.
* Will ask for help as needed using picture board, sign, or words.
* Will use communication board to choose leisure and recreational activities.
* Will respond with "hi" or "bye" when greeted or when he or another person is exiting either with words or gestures.
* Will use a whisper when talking to himself in public places.
* Will use a voice of appropriate pitch and loudness for whatever situation is at hand, with instructional cues.
* Will respond to conversational comments made by other people.
* Will use familiar people's names to greet them and to gain their attention.
* Will engage in short conversations of two to three exchanges with familiar adults on topics other than daily routine using words or communication board.
* Will tell a conversational partner that he needs more information in order to understand.
* Will initiate conversations with familiar adults and peers.
* Will address a directive question to a peer when wanting some information or something from that peer.
* Will make one or two comments about activities in which the student is or was involved, given cues as necessary.
* Will answer the door and carry out simple messages and actions as needed.
* Will use a variety of polite social and request phrases spontaneously and appropriately.
* Will answer the telephone correctly.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: USE OF "NO"
OBJECTIVE: **Will indicate refusal in response to simple questions with a headshake, manual sign, or verbal response.**

RATIONALE: Some learners with autism use socially inappropriate behaviors such as throwing or screaming to indicate refusal. These behaviors may set them apart from other people. Using "No" provides a more acceptable alternative to acting out behavior.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Determine strongly preferred and avoided foods, toys ,and activities.
- For signers, teach head shake and/or sign "No" or "Not." Some students will learn the sign for "not" more easily than the sign for "No," since it is more expressive and easier to produce. If this seems to be the case, decide which to use and be consistent.

Teaching Procedures:

- For initial training, select some objects and foods that the learner likes (music box, several balls, crackers) and some things he does not like or want (pencils, fruit loops, noisemakers).
- Mix both desired and undesired items in a box and pull them out at random. Let the learner eat or keep in his lap the ones he wants. Collect those he models "No" for refusal in another box.
- Pull an undesired item out of this box and ask, "Do you want a _____?" When the learner refuses, model the "No" response. Put it in a box across the table. Select another, repeat question then physically help the student to respond "No." Put the undesired items away.
- Use real situations. Everytime the student begins to show refusal behavior when presented with a food or activity that he could be allowed to refuse, model or shape "No," then remove the undesired item. "You told me 'No'. I'll take the juice away."
- As soon as the student begins to understand how to respond "No," use real situations in all environments to model, shape and cue. Keep the verbal instructions consistent and minimal. Use objects and pictures, too. Always acknowledge your understanding of the refusal.

Associated Objectives:

- Will spontaneously use the "No" response in appropriate situations.
- Will use "No" for other purposes, such as nonexistence and denial.

- Will use "Yes" appropriately.
- Will use social phrases "Yes, please" and "No, thank you" when appropriate.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the student uses a "No" response s/he:

- Has it honored.
- Gets positive attention instead of reactions to negative behaviors when expressing refusal.
- Gains control over his environment.

Sample: "Tell me 'No', then I will put this game away."

Precautions:

- Be sure to allow the learner to refuse items or activities until the "No" response is firmly established. When it is absolutely impossible to comply, reinforce in some other way and explain simply, such as "You told me, no. That's good talking. But we have to get on the bus now. School is over. It's time to go home."
- Do not ask "Do you want...?" when the student has no choice in the matter. Only ask when he can refuse.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: USE OF "HELP"
OBJECTIVE: Will ask for help as needed.

RATIONALE: Many learners with autism are frustrated when they encounter an activity for which they need assistance. Inappropriate behaviors caused by frustration may be diminished by learning how to ask for help as needed.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Nonverbal learners will need an alternative way to ask for help, such as manual sign or a communication board. Model and shape the response initially, then gradually move to prompting and cuing to teach independent use of "Help".

Teaching Procedures:

- Family and staff should decide together which are the most important times the learner wants and needs help. Begin with times he wants and needs help most, such as snack time, opening pop cans or using a tape recorder. Only after he is proficient should he be required to ask for help at times adults want him to; for example getting help to snap pants or turn off the water.

- In addition, teachers may initially arrange some highly motivating situations using highly motivating objects like candy wrappers which the learner can't unwrap or a special item that is too high to reach.
- When situations occur, say "Jane, What do you want?" Pause. "Tell me 'Help'." Then say, "Good. You told me 'Help'. I'll open the door for you." Use whatever cues and prompts may be necessary at first such as producing the sign for help simultaneously. Gradually eliminate prompts and cues to "What do you want?"
- Use every available situation for weeks or months until the student can independently request help.

Associated Objectives:

- Will express the sentence "I need help," or "Help me."
- Will express using social phrases "Help, please." or "Can you help me with this?"
- Will use a person's name to indicate who is to help him.
- Will ask help of people in the community such as sales clerks, librarians, and policemen.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when a learner asks for help he:

- Gets help or desired object.
- Avoids frustration and negative reactions from others.
- Increases his independence from prime care givers.

Sample contingency: "Tell me 'help', then I know to help unzip your coat."

Precautions:

- Some learners don't realize that someone must be able to hear or see the request and therefore may ask for help when no one is there to receive the message. This often causes frustration and s/he may stop asking.
- Initially, help the person when he asks for it. When "Help" is being used consistently by the learner, adults may respond "I think you can do it yourself. Try."

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: CHOOSING LEISURE ACTIVITIES
OBJECTIVE: **Will use a picture/written choice board to choose leisure and recreational activities.**

RATIONALE: Many learners with autism make choices easier when presented with concrete objects or pictured written options. As the number of leisure activities increases, the student needs some way of choosing an activity and communicating his choice to others.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Prepare a choice board that the learner can use.
- Teach the student to associate pictures with favorite people, foods, toys, activities. Have the student practice pointing to the appropriate picture each time the activity, person, or object is introduced using a cue: "Tell me 'trampoline'," modeling and asserting as needed.

Teaching Procedures:

- All adults, including family members, will need to agree on which favorite games and activities should be included. Start with games and activities that the learner already knows and likes. Have these items, games, and activities available in all settings (home, classroom, speech, recreation programs).
- Begin by showing the learner the board and pointing to the picture of the game, e.g., saying "Uno," and then playing with the game. Say "Jake, do you want Uno? Yes? Tell me Uno." Help the student point. Say "Uno" as he points. Shape the point if needed. "Good. Here's Uno." All instructions should involve attainment of the object. This is why it's important to choose what the person would want to ask for and it also shows him how to use the board. Choose one or two items to start with and use the board to get those items in all environments with all staff and parents approaching the learner in the same way.
- As the learner becomes able to use a particular item with help, begin expecting him to find it on the board and point with verbal or gestural cues only. "Jake, what do you want? 'Show me'."
- Later, eliminate the specific cue and cue generally as needed. "Jake, show me?" or "Jake, choose."
- Add new activities, toys, and other items as needed. Teach in the same way.

Associated Objectives:

- Will use the choice board to select a greater number of activities.
- Will use the board to ask for certain friends.
- Will produce more syntactically complete sentences on the board, such as "I want record player" or "Play Candyland."
- Will use the board to ask for outings and places.
- Will use the board to initiate.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the learner uses the board he:

- Gets increased control of his environment.
- Gets preferred activities and preferred items.
- Receives positive attention when using the board.

Sample contingency: "Tell me what you want, then we'll play."

Precautions:

- Make sure the learner's favorite toys, games, and activities are on the board. At first, include even those activities that you'd gradually like to replace, such as items used to self-stimulate, with more appropriate leisure activities. Encourage the learner to communicate those things he likes to do best.
- Staff and parents should be trained to use the board in exactly the same way to avoid confusing the person.

GOAL:	**INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS**
SKILL AREA:	**SOCIAL COMMUNICATION**
SKILL:	**"HI" AND "BYE"**
OBJECTIVES:	**Will say "Hi" or "Bye" when greeting or when he or another person is exiting.**

RATIONALE: Learners with autism usually need to be specifically taught social interacting, since they do not often learn this through mere observation.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- In environments with nonverbal and minimally verbal people, gestures/signs should always be used with the verbal greetings. Some verbal students may first use the gestures and/or signs before they are ready to use the verbal. Encourage this and reinforce.

Teaching Procedures:

- People will use "Hi" or "Bye" naturally and appropriately. If the learner responds appropriately, then follow with a second statement as reinforcement to the social act, such as "Glad to see you," or "See you later, Ken."
- If the learner does not respond, provide a model and explanation. "Ken, I said 'Hi'. Can you say 'Hi' to me, then we'll_____." Don't press an immediate response if he is reluctant at first. He should only be pressed to do this with one familiar person per setting.
- Later, fade to cues such as repeating the greeting and standing in front of the learner until he responds.

Associated Objectives:

- Will use people's names with greetings.
- Will initiate conversations saying "Hi, Joyce."
- Will initiate conversation using "Hi, how are you?" or similar greeting.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the student uses "Hi" or "Goodbye" he:

- Receives one-to-one personal contact when entering and exiting.
- Recognizes "Hi" and "Bye" as a cue for beginnings and endings of certain activities.
- Recognizes he is more like others in the group.

Sample contingency: "Tell Jim, 'Bye', then we'll go."

Precautions:

- This should be natural and fun. Don't make the learner greet every single person each time he changes settings. The rest of us don't do that! Take note of what others do and how they greet each other. Use age appropriate and setting appropriate greetings.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: WHISPERING TO SELF
OBJECTIVE: **Will use a whisper when talking to himself in public places.**

RATIONALE: Some students talk to themselves to reassure themselves or as a rehearsal strategy. This may bring negative reactions from people in public. The student may not be ready to give up the self-directed verbalizing, but he may be able to learn to whisper as an intermediate step.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Some students may need an interim step of quiet talking before whispering, or others may be able to eliminate a whispering stage completely.
- Students often need to become familiar and at ease with the public place before emphasizing this objective.

Teaching Procedures:

- Before going out, discuss public places, where they are, why people go there and who may be there. Discuss and practice what whispering is. Explain, "Talking to yourself is private. You need to whisper so no one can hear your private talk." Discuss what the learner should do if he becomes upset and

make sure he knows what his acceptable alternatives are (such as returning to the car, leaving the store, telling an adult.)

- Start with a short stay in the public place, even five to ten minutes; gradually increase the time the student stays in public and uses a whisper. When an outing is reinforcing, use increased time or additional outings as reinforcement.
- Provide picture and/or written enablers for rehearsal and cues.

Associated Objectives:

- Will eliminate all self-talk while in public.
- Will speak to self in whispers only, at all times.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when a student uses a whisper he:

- Avoids negative reactions of others.
- Recognizes that people will invite him out more.
- Recognizes he is acting more like others in a public setting.

Sample: "If you talk to yourself in a whisper at the store, we can go play video games next."

Precautions:

- Avoid working on too many behaviors at once on outings. Avoid reprimanding self-talk and rehearsal. These often are necessary for the person with autism.

GOAL:	INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILL
SKILL AREA:	SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL:	VOICE USAGE
OBJECTIVE:	**Will use a voice of appropriate pitch and loudness for the situation with cues.**

RATIONALE: Many learners with autism are unaware of the effects of their voices. They may speak too loudly or in very demanding tones, especially when anxious.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- The learner may need to start practicing in one situation only. When he is successful in one setting, begin expanding to others.
- The learner will need to become familiar with the community setting before this objective is heavily emphasized.

Teaching Procedures:

- Discuss in language training sessions or in conversation time when we use soft voices, loud voices, very loud voices, or very soft voices. Play act being at the library, calling a friend, being on the playground, sitting in class, riding in the car, walking in the hall, or eating in the cafeteria.
- Videotape role playing using correct voice and incorrect voice. Discuss the reactions of others.
- Go to the real places and practice.
- Use natural situations. Point out times the learner is speaking correctly and reinforce her. Give her reminders as needed with learned cues.
- Practice how the learner will speak in a certain situation. Remind her ahead of time when appropriate, such as "What kind of voice will we use while we are inside the library?" Use cue cards as reminders and for self-monitoring.

Associated Objectives:

- Will use appropriate voice tones while speaking, such as happy voice, polite voice, or sad voice.
- Will use social and polite phrases such as "Do you mind if....?", along with appropriate voice tones.
- Will expand the setting and situations where she uses appropriate voice pitch and tone.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when a learner uses an appropriate voice level she:

- Avoids negative reactions to an unpleasant voice.
- Recognizes that people will invite her to more places.
- Recognize she is acting like others in a public setting.

Sample: "If you use an 'inside voice' in the library, you may stay fifteen minutes longer."

Precautions:

- Avoid loading too much at once on the learner, such as working on several behaviors and voice level at the same time. Activities should be enjoyable.
- Be aware of times when anxiety may cause the learner to use a loud or demanding voice. Helping the learner become more comfortable in the situation may sometimes eliminate much of the problem.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: CONVERSATION SKILLS
OBJECTIVE: **Will respond to conversational comments made by other people.**

RATIONALE: After learners have gained some conversational skills they frequently fail to continue conversing in response to comments by others. The conversation may end if direct questions are not continually asked of people with autism.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Answer direct questions with "Yes" or "No".
- Answer questions requiring a phrase or sentence in response.
- Practice sticking to a subject that the learner introduces for three or four conversational turns.
- Practice continuing a conversation that is not of great interest to the learner.

Teaching Procedures:

- Explain to the learner that when we talk to people we answer their questions. We also answer after they tell us something, commenting on the same subject or changing it.
- In a structured conversational group use an arrow to point to the person whose turn it is to talk. This lets him know that he is responsible for saying something. A ball or block could be passed from the speaker to the listener as the speaker finishes talking. This cues her that it is her turn.
- If the learner has difficulty knowing what to say, jot down conversation topics in a list. For example, the teacher says, "I have a six-month old baby at home," and writes down the word "baby," The learner then knows he needs to ask or say something about a baby. He needs to think of something on this subject.
- Begin training in language or conversational sessions. Then expand to other environments. Use tokens or points as necessary at first.
- If the learner always insists on talking about his favorite topic, set up a time for talking about the favorite topic. Then when another topic is introduced, redirect to the topic: "We can talk about what you want to talk about at snack time. Now we're talking about my choice or about x."

Associated Objectives:

- Will carry on conversations of several minutes in length on subjects of interest to the learner.
- Will converse for one minute on subjects of interest to a conversational partner.
- Will respond to comments made by peers.
- Will ask for more information about a subject.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the learner responds to conversational comments by others he:

- Receives positive attention from other people.
- Enjoys a more reciprocal relationship with others.

Sample: "I like it when we talk about my favorite sports. Now, what would you like to talk about?"

Precautions:

- Give the learner as many cues as she needs in order to know what to say. Use pictures, written words, or objects as cues.
- Encourage him to be as creative as he can.
- Give her all the time she needs.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: USING NAMES
OBJECTIVE: **Will use familiar people's names to greet them and to gain their attention.**

RATIONALE: Using people's names focuses their attention. Learners with autism often talk without first getting the attention needed. This can lead to frustration due to lack of any response.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Help the person learn the names of the people around him. Printed cues or name tags may help.
- Establish a daily communication group to practice skills.

Teaching Procedures:

- Explain importance of using people's names; for example, it helps the person know who the learner is addressing, it makes the person feel good, it's polite. Keep explanations brief and as concrete as possible.

- Play a game which involves greeting each person by name. Model as needed.
- Model role-playing using a person's name. Encourage the learner to role-play. Role-playing should be practiced for a real situation which will happen that day. Role play can be videotaped and replayed for the learner to identify how he does, then applied to the real situation.
- Send the learner on "talking errands" to deliver messages or to ask for information, such as "Ask Grace if she wants grape juice or orange juice for snack," or "Ask, three teachers their favorite food." Remind him to use names. Reinforce appropriate behavior.
- People will need to respond every time the learner uses their names even though they may not be able to fulfill a particular request at that time.
- Staff in all settings will need to work together to help generalize the skills to all settings.
- Use printed names paired with pictures of people as cues and reminders.

Associated Objectives:

- Will open conversations appropriately using a person's name.
- Will use polite phrases while expressing needs and wants and while asking questions.
- When making a request in a group situation, will specify one person by name.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when a student uses a person's name he :

- Gets positive attention from that person.
- Avoids frustration due to lack of a response.
- Sees how he is like others in his peer group.

Sample: "If you use Joan's name, she will answer your question." or "When you use my name to talk to me, it makes me feel special. I like that!"

Precautions:

- Make this natural. Learners should not have to use the names every single time that they acknowledge someone's presence.
- Work on this to show when and how to use greetings and at other natural times to gain attention, to give compliments, or to share.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: CONVERSATION SKILLS
OBJECTIVE: **Will engage in short conversations of two to three exchanges with familiar adults on topics other than daily routine.**

RATIONALE: Many students are severely limited in their ability to converse in a reciprocal way. They are often uneasy around people and are unable to take another person's perspective.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- The learner may initially need to discuss her daily routine, make it conversational.
- Some learners are more comfortable conversing with staff when they are doing a favorite repetitive activity with their hands. This seems to help reduce the pressure of conversing.
- The learner will participate in practiced interaction skill activities.
- At first, the learner may need to do some easy, familiar activities and gradually lead into conversation skills as she becomes comfortable with the staff and peers.

Teaching Procedures:

- Begin in language training lessons and expand to all environments. Use materials with which the learner is currently involved or with which he is familiar. This is especially necessary when changing environments. The last activity at school may be the only thing the student remembers.
- Shoot a couple of rolls of film resulting in snapshots of family and friends and the student himself engaging in familiar activities. Use these for stimuli. Also, use natural situations as they occur.
- In language lessons, keep talking charts with motivating rewards. Do not cajole or coerce. Explain the activity and the reward and then precede naturally.
- If a topic is initiated and the learner does not wish to discuss it, change topics. Reintroduce the topic later.
- In all environments, when the learner makes a comment spontaneously, casually attempt to turn it into a conversation. Self-answered questions or talking to self can be useful techniques used by the staff. If the learner does not answer a question, repeat, if there's still no response, the speaker may answer as if talking to herself. This procedure models appropriate responses

and may interest the learner. He may comment in response to the self-talk once the pressure is off.

- Avoid setting up a one-to-one reinforcement schedule that uses coercion, such as "I'll give you a pretzel if you talk to me." Move to casually rewarding with verbal and other reinforcers, such as "We had a nice conversation. Let's have two minutes of free time." or "I really enjoyed our talk. Let's have a snack."

Associated Objectives:

- Will engage in conversations of one minute in length about subjects of special interest to the student.
- Will demonstrate appropriate social behavior while conversing.
- Will initiate conversations appropriately.
- Will stick to one subject of interest to the conversational partner for five exchanges.

Plans for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the student converses with adults he:

- Receives positive attention.
- Enjoys talking about topics of interest to him.
- Enjoys looking at and manipulating photos or drawings of himself and familiar things.

Sample: "I'll sit at the table with you, while you tell me about the show."

Precautions:

- Avoid force and undue pressure which puts adult and leaner into adversary roles in a power struggle. This is not conducive to natural, free conversation. Keep conversations natural.
- Avoid making the learner answer questions to which you both obviously know the answer, such as "What's your name?" or "What's my name?"
- Don't require behavioral or syntactic perfection. Remember that normal two year olds begin conversing long before they correctly use the rules of grammar. Keep this fun.

GOAL:	INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA:	SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL:	CONVERSATION SKILL
OBJECTIVE:	**Will tell a conversational partner that he needs more information in order to understand.**

RATIONALE: Because experiences, perceptions, and language skills may be limited, many learners with autism tune out conversations. When they don't understand the subject, they may daydream or exhibit negative behaviors. They need to learn to continually focus their direct attention and to let the person know when they do not understand.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- Have learner practice some basic conversational skills:
- Look at people who are talking.
- Stand at appropriate distance while talking.
- Use voice of appropriate pitch and loudness.
- Listen to other person talk.
- Wait until other person is finished before talking (will need to learn varying completion cues).
- Answer direct questions.
- Stick to topic for four conversational turns.

Teaching Procedures:

- Explain what to do when the learner doesn't understand, such as say, "I don't understand," or "What does ____ mean?"
- Role play with teachers. Sprinkle conversation with terms or concepts the student may need to understand. Ask periodically "What does ___ mean?" If the learner has trouble, cue him, "Ask Mr. Smith what ___ means," or "Tell Mr. Smith you don't understand." It is often easier to ask about a single word than to state, "I don't understand" in a general way.
- Add peers to the conversation. Continue to ask the student if he understands and cue him to ask for more information or for clarification with "Tell Sam you don't understand, " or " Ask Sam what he means."
- Use natural conversations as they occur. Cue student as needed.
- Use whatever point system or tokens may be necessary to keep the student focused. This may be difficult at first.

Associated Objectives:

- Will stick to topics introduced by other people for eight conversational turns.
- Will listen to others talk, following their conversations.
- Will join into conversations of others and stick to their conversation topic.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the learner asks for more information, he:

- Gets information he can understand.
- Gets support and attention from a person.
- Enjoys more satisfying conversations and increased social contact with others.

Sample: "When you ask such good questions, you get to know a lot of new things."

Precautions:

- Don't make conversation drudgery. Practice this in a specific setting first and leave other conversations natural and unstressful. This objective may be stressful for some. Keep practice as light as possible by keeping subjects fun, by providing all cues needed to be successful from the beginning, and by practicing for short periods of time.
- Be aware that learners may have difficulty using "I don't understand" generally, and may only be able to apply it to concrete work or a specific phrase they don't understand.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: CONVERSATION SKILLS
OBJECTIVE: **Will initiate conversations with familiar adults and peers, introducing appropriate subjects.**

RATIONALE: When learners enjoy conversation, they may still not know how to initially engage someone in a conversation. Sometimes an inappropriate behavior is used to gain attention or a stereotypic utterance is used to start talking.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Practice engaging in short conversations with adults and peers initiated by others. Practice responding to questions of others and discussing daily routine and other very familiar topics.
- Practice greeting people with "Hi" and "Bye" and using people's names.
- Some students may respond best to writing out conversational openings and reading them as they rehearse at first.

Teaching Procedures:

- Practice some specific conversational openers, "Hi, ____. What's new?" or "Hi ____. How are you doing?" At this point, the burden of the topic of conversation is on the other person.

- Move to "Hi, ____. Guess what happened at school today?" or "Hi, ____. I had a busy week."
- List some things the learner can talk about. Begin with an appropriate opener and converse in special conversation time. The learner may need to make lists of possible topics in his notebook. Books on making friends may be useful for some children.
- Cue the learner to appropriate conversation openers and topics as he moves from his conversation time to the next environment on his schedule. The adult with whom he has practiced can cue him, if needed. Fade cuing as quickly as possible. Move to cuing before the learner goes to the next setting. The staff or peers in the next setting will cue as needed by asking open-ended questions and letting the student suggest the topic, as "Hi, Dan. What's new?"
- Before the learner goes home he can write down a list of topics that he wishes to tell his family.
- Help the learner rehearse ideas for conversations before specific situations like outings, visits, and having guests.

Examples: "Tell Jim about ____ when you see him at the Boy's Club." "Could you think of a question to ask Jim?" "Let's ask our guests what drink they would like."

Associated Objectives:

- Will open conversations appropriately with peers that the student has recently met.
- Will ask other students to join an activity.
- Will ask if he can join in an activity or game.
- Will ask for help in the community from appropriate community helpers.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the learner initiates conversations she:

- Receives positive reactions.
- Receives information that is interesting to her.
- Recognizes she is liked by her peer group.

Sample: "When you talk to Jim, he really feels like being your friend." "When you told Jim he's a good basketball player, he smiled."

Precautions:

- Avoid leaning on stereotypic use of conversation openers. Perhaps start with one, but quickly encourage students to use several different ways of initiating conversations.
- Be careful not to reinforce the one stereotypic opener too strongly.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: TALKING TO PEERS
OBJECTIVE: **Will address a directive or question to a peer when he wants some information or something from that peer.**

RATIONALE: Talking to peers may be very difficult for some learners with autism . They may tend to address all talk to a familiar adult, even when it has to do with a peer.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Some learners may need to adhere to a few patterned phrases and be unable to handle novel messages or requests. Modify as needed. Printed cues may be necessary for some learners.

Teaching Procedures:

- In a structured lesson or structured game time, encourage the student to ask one peer for something. At first model the target sentence "Tell Ann, 'Please give me a card'." Then fade to a cue with "What do you need to ask Ann?" Gradually fade out cues. Use playing cards and other games that require the learners to verbalize a target sentence to another player.
- In real situations, give the learners reasonable messages or questions to ask, such as "Ask Ann what she would like to drink." He may need models at first, then fade to cues.
- Whenever the learner asks a question about a peer that the other leaner could answer, direct him to ask the peer. Use models as needed at first, later fading to prompts such as "Who should you ask?"

Associated Objectives:

- Will answer questions from peers.
- Will engage in short conversations with sociable peers.
- Will greet peers with names and appropriate greetings.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so when a student addresses a peer he:

- Gets a desired response or action from a peer.
- Gets positive attention and acceptance as a member of a peer group.

Sample: "If you ask Maria for the clay, she'll give you some," or "Tell John 'it's my turn,' then you can get on the trampoline."

Precautions:

- Try to avoid stereotypic use of one or a few phrases. Help the learner gradually move to use of novel sentences.

- Make sure all persons use consistent cues and have consistent expectations so the new skill carries over to all environments.
- Some peers may not respond even if the student asks questions appropriately; sociable peers more often reinforce with a response.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: TALKING ABOUT ACTIVITIES
OBJECTIVE: **Will make one or two comments about activities in which she is or was involved, given cues as necessary.**

RATIONALE: Some learners with autism only use their language skills to talk about concrete things, what will happen next, or to repeat a question of great concern. They often require specific training to expand their use of language.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- The leaner will need to be taught basic vocabulary necessary for describing the activities. Teach vocabulary first if necessary, including people's names, action verbs, basic descriptive words, names of objects and activities at home, work, and in the community.
- Establish a daily social communication group to practice skills.

Teaching Procedures:

- Begin by talking about present events, about things as they occur. Model appropriate descriptions of activities and ask simple questions.
- Then talk about events immediately afterwards, this time using past tense.
- Talk about concrete things that just happened, asking specific questions as necessary such as "What did you eat for lunch?" rather than general questions like "What did you do today?"
- Teach the student to carry a notebook. Jot activities down in his notebook so that when he goes to the next setting adults and peers can refer to the book and see specific items the learner might discuss.
- Draw pictures of events that occur and discuss them afterward. Write out descriptions of events with the learner's help.
- Use real photos of the learner doing activities. Use these as memory joggers to help him discuss things that happened.
- Use videos and written reminders.

Associated Objectives:

- Will comment on activities spontaneously to a familiar person.

- Will describe events after they occur to others.
- Will comment on activities to peers.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when a student comments on his activities he:

- Receives positive attention.
- Receives information that is interesting to him.
- Realizes he can share important events in his life with others.

Sample: "Tell me where you went on your trip, then I'll tell you about mine."

Precautions:

- Learners with autism need to understand the worth of communication before they need to use syntactically correct sentence construction. Do not get bogged down with grammar. Rather, let the student learn joy and value of sharing with and talking to others. Once he understands this, he will be in a better position to understand use of standard forms of grammar.
- Initially, staff will need to know the answers to the questions asked so prompts and cues can be provided.

GOAL:	INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA:	SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL:	ANSWERING THE DOOR
OBJECTIVE:	**Will answer the door and carry out simple messages and actions as needed.**

RATIONALE: Answering the door can be over-stimulating to many learners with autism, causing guests, particularly strangers, to feel uncomfortable. Structured practice can help the learner know how to behave and what to do.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- The learner should practice the necessary steps in structured lessons:
  - Tell an adult the bell is ringing or someone is knocking.
  - Ask permission to go to the door.
  - Open the door when permission is granted.
  - Open the door and call someone.
  - Learn to unlock and re-lock the door and screen door.
  - Greet people with "Hello," or "Hi."

Teaching Procedures:

- Staff must decide with parents how they want to do this at home, such as dealing with a person at the door without inviting the person inside, or re-locking the door afterwards.
- Have a second adult or peer knock on the door. Model and cue the greeting decided upon, such as, "Hello. May I help you?" If he knows the person, say "Hello, ____. Come on in." Provide written cues or pictures. Have all the rules outlined clearly.
- Practice calling or going to get the desired person.
- After he can do that, practice reporting that the desired person is not available.
- When successful, practice carrying out a simple action (such as the caller saying, "I left my umbrella. Can you get it for me?") or delivering a simple message ("Tell Mrs. Jones that Jimmy is sick today").
- End with "Good bye, " plus the name when he knows it, close the door, and re-lock it, if desired, at home.
- Use real situations when it is known beforehand that someone will arrive at the door. Prepare the student in advance.
- When the learner can correctly carry out actions and deliver messages for rehearsed situations, begin allowing him to answer the door at unrehearsed times with permission. Cue as necessary to help him answer the door at unrehearsed times. Cue as necessary to help him know what to do and what to expect until he can perform the routine independently.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the student answers the door appropriately he:

- Recognizes that he has an important function as a family member.
- Recognizes his accomplishment and increased independence.

Sample: "It sure helps me when you answer the door."

Precautions:

- Make sure the learner can consistently perform correctly in practice before expecting him to answer an unexpected doorbell or knock.
- Avoid having the learner become frustrated because he is unprepared and doesn't know what to do.
- Make sure the entire routine is learned in a safe way.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: POLITE SPEECH
OBJECTIVE: **Will use a variety of polite social and request phrases spontaneously and appropriately.**

RATIONALE: Learners with autism can be very demanding. As they develop more advanced language and social skills, they also must learn how their speech affects the feelings and reactions of others. This becomes increasingly important as the learner becomes involved with greater numbers of people in social and work relationships.

Teaching Procedures:

- Write out polite phrases on a chart or sentence strips. These might include "Please, " "Thank you," "Would you please...?" "Would you like to ...?" "Would it be all right if...?" and "Excuse me, please."
- Explain why we use these phrases; for example, it's polite, they make people feel friendly, they make people happier about doing what we ask.
- Role play in a structured setting, using printed cues if needed. Then use in real but structured situations in lessons. Have parties, play games, do art projects where she has to ask for the items she needs.
- Use video equipment for practice both using and not using the phrases. While viewing, discuss people's positive and negative reactions to use of and omission of the polite phrases.
- Expand to general use with printed cues posted. Ask, "How should you ask for that?", pointing to the proper printed cue. Gradually eliminate the printed cues,if practical. Reminders such as "You need to ask politely," may be needed.
- Practice ahead of time "How will you ask the lunchroom aide for another spoon?"

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Use all the printed cues necessary to help remind the student.
- The learner may also need practice to modulate his voice and ask in a polite tone rather than a demanding tone of voice.

Associated Objectives:

- Will ask for help and information in the community, talking to waitresses, store clerks, and librarians using polite speech.
- Will perform errands in school and neighborhood using polite speech.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the student uses polite phrases he:

- Gets assistance or things he wants.
- Gets a positive reaction from people.
- Feels accepted and comfortable in the setting.

Sample: "When you talk pleasantly, the waitress smiles."

Precautions:

- Carry over is important here, since this is primarily teaching the learner to deal with others. Make sure the skill is being used around home, work, school, and friends. Make sure all staff use the same cues and have the same expectations.
- Sociable peers might also be trained to cue the learner to use polite speech in natural situations.
- Watching themselves on videotape can be motivating to learners, however some learners may have difficulty attending to the objective of the lesson or become very excited by seeing their own behavior on tape.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: ANSWERING THE TELEPHONE
OBJECTIVE: Will answer the telephone correctly

RATIONALE: Some learners with autism are fearful of or excited by the telephone and are unable to use it correctly. Learning to answer it correctly will save time and embarrassment for the family and will contribute to independence in this area.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Recognizing a telephone ring.
- Discussing the use of telephones.
- Understanding a real person is calling whom we cannot see.
- Holding the phone properly.
- Talking in voice of appropriate pitch and loudness level.

Teaching Procedures: Establish the following steps:

* Picking up the phone and saying "Hello."
* Listening for the caller's response or request.

* Saying "Yes. Just a minute, please" or "No. Please call back. Good bye."
* Going to get the desired person, or referring the caller to someone for all other situations with "I'll get ___. He can help you."
* Agree on a telephone answering pattern such as the one listed above.
* Borrow Bell telephone's telephone package for training special education students. It includes two real phones and a small switch-board to produce rings and signals.
* Use printed cues and pictures to describe the entire procedure. Practice first answering and saying "Hello." Then add the caller's wishes "Is your mother at home?" Vary the names and use real people in the classroom and at home. Begin by using people who are available.
* When successful, ask for people who are not present.
* Vary asking for people who are present and who are not present.
* When successful, add other situations, such as the caller wishing to leave a message or asking when the person will return.
* Have student refer the caller to an adult for these situations.
* Begin by having phones together at the table. Then remove one phone to a hidden spot or out of the room and repeat. At first, have the student rehearse before the phone rings. Tell him exactly what kind of call is coming. Later, tell him a call is coming but encourage him to follow through without previous rehearsal. Gradually move from practice phones to real phones, starting with prearranged calls. Only when consistently successful at these planned calls should the learner be expected to answer the phone for unknown situations.

Associated Objectives:

- Will deliver a simple message to a person who is present.
- Will write down and deliver a message to a person later.
- Will carry on a conversation with a person who calls the learner on the telephone.
- Will place calls asking for information.
- Will call friends and family members for conversation and for inviting or other specific purposes.
- Will practice reporting emergencies to police, fire department, and operator.
- Will practice calling a neighbor for help.
- Will visit the telephone company and observe operators and machinery at work.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the student answers the telephone correctly he:

- Recognizes he is like other family members.
- Recognizes his increased independence and importance.
- Gets to use the phone to call people he likes.
- Has fun interacting.

Sample: "Thanks, for calling me. I'll talk, then you talk to grandma."

Precautions:

- Make sure the learner is consistently successful in trial situations before asking him to answer unexpected calls. It is very frustrating for most people with autism to have a new, unexpected request come over the phone before he knows how to handle it.
- Establish telephone rules, so the use of the phone is not abused.

GOAL: INCREASE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILL: GIVING A COMPLIMENT
OBJECTIVE: Will compliment a familiar person about personal appearance or some possession.

RATIONALE: People with autism often have difficulty initiating a conversation and taking the perspective of another person. By initiating with a compliment, a friendly response usually comes back.

Modification and Lead-up Activities:

- Has experience hearing and seeing others compliment.
- Has experience receiving compliments.
- Has learned to make a comment about some observed object.
- Has learned to initiate a greeting.
- Has learned a carrier phrase such as "I like" and/or "You look."

Teaching Procedures:

- Identify objects or attributes to say something nice about.
- Teach pleasant comments by practicing reading them and saying them about specific items or attributes.
- Role play situations that are real with people that the learner might encounter; include smiling and eye contact as the learner is successful.
- Teach responding to a compliment with smiles and thank you.

- Assign the learner to make compliments to 3 identified people. The compliments can be planned and written out ahead of time.
- Teach the learner when it's appropriate to compliment like when first meeting a person that day.

Associated Objects:

- Will receive compliments from others, making a socially appropriate response.
- Will initiate greetings.
- Will initiate by asking a question.
- Will initiate by _____.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the learner compliments someone she:

- Receives smiles and pleasant interactions.
- Is encouraged to initiate more interactions.
- Begins to acknowledge positive features more than negative.
- Sample: "When you told her you liked her earrings, she smiled and was happy."

Precautions:

- Since people with autism learn rote routines , care needs to be taken to ensure appropriateness of comments both in content and timing. Adjustments for age-groups and environments will have to be considered.

Summary:

These detailed objectives comprise a small sample to give the reader ideas for designing personalized social communication objectives. Continual assessment and adjustments are needed to ensure progress and success. Remember that social communication is very complex for all individuals; but for people with autism it is impossible to be successful without planned teaching strategies. Because learning and practicing these skills relies on structured social group teaching throughout a person's life, as well as reliable feedback and support from peers, these particular skills are seldom taught systematically and are relegated to chance learning. This ommission is a mistake and should be reconsidered. For people with autism, learning functional social skills and behaviors may be the most important things they learn. The learning can only be accomplished through real situations, not through discussion or reading. Therefore, include social communication objectives, be creative and specific when teaching, and individualize for each person with autism and each situation. Have fun teaching and communicating.

File: ND2; Disk 10b 9/2/92